

Module 3

Risk Reduction

In this module, we will discuss:

- Handwashing
- Covering coughs and sneezes
- Staying away from crowds
- Wearing a facemask or respirator
- Cleaning and disinfecting

In Module 1, you learned how seriously a flu pandemic could affect every type of workplace, the health care system and everyday life for millions of people in New Jersey. In Module 2, you learned about important things you can do to prepare for a pandemic.

There are very specific steps you can take to reduce your risk of getting sick.

Wash Your Hands, Wash Your Hands, Wash Your Hands

We touch many things throughout the day – when we open a door, shake hands with people, hold a restaurant menu, pay for something at the cash register, or use someone's computer or telephone. Every day, we handle dozens of objects that have already been touched by many other people. Germs can spread whenever we touch one of these things and then touch our nose, mouth or eyes before washing our hands.

Frequent handwashing is the best way to keep germs from spreading and to help protect you and people around you from getting sick. It sounds like a very simple activity – and it is. The hard part, for all of us, is remembering to do it the right way and often enough. One study found that even health care workers wash their hands only about half the time they should.



Pandemic Influenza Awareness Program

This program is made possible by the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness and the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.



AN INVISIBLE ENEMY

In a flu pandemic, frequent handwashing is especially important because flu viruses can be spread by people who aren't showing symptoms yet and may not even know they are sick. This means that a person can spread the flu a day before they get sick while they look and feel perfectly healthy. If you shook that person's hand or shared a commonly used item, such as a pen, and didn't wash your hands afterward, you run the risk of catching the flu. Under the right conditions, this virus can stay alive, outside the body, for hours.



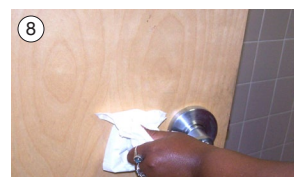
During a pandemic, you may choose to use disposable gloves when performing certain activities. This is not a substitute for handwashing. Always wash your hands after removing the gloves.

THE RIGHT WAY TO WASH

Knowing when to wash your hands is important for reducing risk. The other essential factor is knowing how to wash properly. Let's review what it takes to do it right.

1. Use warm water to wet your hands.
2. Use soap. It doesn't matter what type of soap you use – they all help to remove viruses from your skin.
3. Scrub thoroughly. That means getting soap between your fingers, under your nails and on the palms and backs of your hands, all the way up to the wrists. To remove viruses, spend at least 15 to 20 seconds scrubbing every time you wash. (You can time yourself by singing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.)
4. Rinse your hands well and don't turn off the water. Remember, you just turned it on with dirty hands.
5. In a public rest room, dry your clean hands completely with either paper towels or a blow dryer.
6. Use a paper towel or a part of your clothing to turn off the faucet and open the door. To keep your hands clean after washing, remember to not touch the faucet handles, counter tops or doorknobs – they're likely to have germs on them.

Being a better handwasher is one of the easiest ways to stay healthy. Start today by making handwashing a healthy part of your normal routine.



If we're graded on how we normally wash hands, many people would fail.



You may not always have access to soap and water. Instead, use the best alternative: alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Alcohol-based disposable hand wipes are another option.

Read the *Wash Your Hands* poster at the end of this module. You can use it to teach children about the right way to wash their hands. Germs spread quickly and easily among children.



USE HAND SANITIZER

You may not always have access to soap and water. Instead, use the best alternative: alcohol-based hand sanitizer. It should contain at least 60% alcohol, so check the label. To use it:

- Apply a small amount of sanitizer to the palm of one hand [check the label for specific recommendations]
- Rub hands together, spreading the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers
- Rub briskly until hands are dry

Alcohol-based disposable hand wipes are another option.

Cover Coughs and Sneezes

As we mentioned in Module 1, when someone coughs or sneezes, or even talks, their germs move through the air very quickly. Droplets containing the flu virus can travel up to 6 feet in seconds, landing on other people and objects. Protect everyone around you by covering all of your coughs and sneezes.



QUIZ 1

For how long should you scrub your hands?

- ☐ A: 2 seconds
- ☐ B: 5 to 10 seconds
- ☐ C: 15 to 20 seconds
- ☐ D: 1 minute

Answers are at the end of this module.



People can be infected with the flu virus, look and feel healthy and spread the flu for 24 hours *before* they feel sick. For that reason, if the pandemic is severe and someone in your household has the flu, you may be asked to stay home.



Protect everyone around you by covering all of your coughs and sneezes.

Stay Away from Crowds

Generally, adults who have the flu can spread the virus for up to 5 days after they start feeling sick. Children can spread the flu virus for 7 days or more after they become sick. However, as we mentioned earlier, people can be infected with the flu virus, look and feel healthy and spread the flu for 24 hours *before* they feel sick. For that reason, if the pandemic is severe and someone in your household has the flu, you may be asked to stay home. Even if you're not sick, you could still be infected and able to spread the flu to others.

So, logically, the more people you're around, the greater the probability that you are near someone who is carrying the flu virus – but doesn't even know it yet.

In a pandemic, to reduce the chances of exposing more and more people to the flu virus, public gatherings like concerts or sports events are likely to be cancelled. Schools, day care centers, colleges and some workplaces might be closed. Movie theaters and shopping malls might be closed.

It may not be easy, but if you can manage to avoid crowds, you'll be exposed to fewer viruses. This protective approach, called "social distancing," helps lower your risk of catching the flu.

During a pandemic, when you have to be in a group and want to avoid catching the flu, stay at least six feet away from other people and limit the amount of time you are there.



QUIZ 2

If you want to reduce your risk of catching the flu, you should keep a certain distance from people who are coughing or sneezing. How far can those cough or sneeze droplets travel?

- ☐ A: 1 foot
- ☐ B: 2 to 5 feet
- ☐ C: Up to 6 feet
- ☐ D: 10 to 12 feet

Answers are at the end of this module.



Both facemasks (above) and respirators (below) work by trapping harmful particles inside the mesh fibers of which they are made. However, facemasks are not designed to protect you from breathing in very small particles, like the flu virus.

PHOTO (BELOW) COURTESY MOLDEX



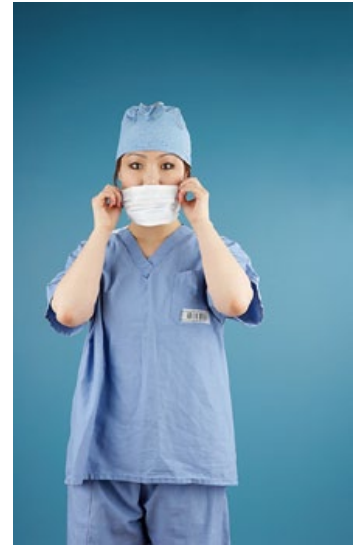
Respirators with an exhalation valve should not be worn by people who are sick, or people who have been exposed to sick people.

Wear a Facemask or Respirator

For most of us, it's tough to avoid every type of crowded situation. Wherever you are, protecting yourself from germs is important. During a flu pandemic, people may be wearing facemasks or respirators when they are in public places. Both facemasks and respirators work by trapping harmful particles inside the mesh fibers of which they are made.

WHAT IS A FACEMASK?

A facemask is a loose-fitting, disposable mask that covers the nose and the mouth. People wear them to help stop their own large droplets from spreading to others and to keep splashes or sprays from reaching their mouth and nose. However, facemasks are not designed to protect you from *breathing in* very small particles, like the flu virus.



WHAT IS A RESPIRATOR?

A respirator is designed to protect you from breathing in very small particles that may contain viruses like pandemic flu. One example is the N95 filtering facepiece respirator. It is designed to filter out at least 95% of very small airborne particles. Other respirators, such as the N99 (99% of particles) and N100 (99.97%), can also be used.

Filtering facepiece respirators fit tightly over the nose and mouth so that air is inhaled only through the filter material. For best results, respirators must be specially fitted for each person who wears one. This "fit-testing" is usually done in a workplace where respirators are used. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration requires fit-testing for employees who wear respirators for their jobs.

Some filtering face piece respirators come with an exhalation valve that releases the air you breathe out without filtering it. This type of respirator should not be worn by people who are sick, or people who have been exposed to sick people. This is because people who have been infected with the flu virus can unknowingly spread the disease to others for up to 24 hours before they feel sick.

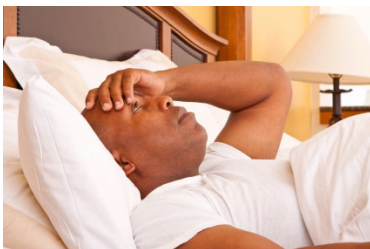
Specific N95 respirators have been cleared by the United States Food and Drug Administration for use by the public during public health medical emergencies, provided the users carefully follow instructions.

If you have heart or lung disease or other health conditions, you may have trouble breathing through a respirator and should talk with your doctor before using one.

If you or a family member catches the flu, it's best for that person to stay home. Nothing can absolutely guarantee that the virus won't spread, but having the patient wear a facemask may help lower the risk of spreading the flu within your home. If facemasks are not available, the person should cover their nose and mouth with a tissue or paper towel when in the presence of others. These materials, along with facemasks and respirators, should be disposed of properly.

Should you wear a facemask or respirator in crowds? Actually, very little is known about the benefits of wearing facemasks or respirators to help control the spread of pandemic flu in a community; however, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have provided some guidelines.

Read the *Use of Facemasks and Respirators in the Community* resource at the end of this module.



If you or a family member catches the flu, it's best for that person to stay home.

QUIZ 3

Which of these is TRUE?

- ☐ A: Facemasks and respirators provide the same type of protection
- ☐ B: Facemasks prevent your own droplets from being spread to others
- ☐ C: Respirators protect you from inhaling very small particles such as the flu virus
- ☐ D: Both B and C are true

Answers are at the end of this module.



Clean and Disinfect

Flu viruses are stubborn. They can live up to 2 days on hard surfaces, such as stainless steel and hard plastic, and up to 12 hours on materials such as cloth and paper.

To keep them under control, first use a general household cleaner (soap or detergent) to wash doorknobs, countertops, sinks and any other hard surface touched by more than one person. Then use a household disinfectant. Cleaning helps to remove germs. Disinfecting destroys them. Electronic items like computers, handheld games and remote control devices should be cleaned regularly with disinfectant wipes. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions.

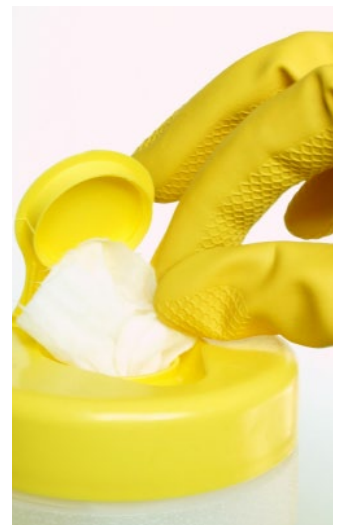
If disinfectants are not available, you can make one by mixing 1/4 cup bleach in 1 gallon of water, or one tablespoon of bleach in four cups of water. Be careful to read and follow all the warnings and instructions on the bleach label. Use paper towels for both cleaning and disinfecting, and wear disposable gloves.

If you are caring for someone who is ill during a flu pandemic, you don't have to disinfect their laundry. Wear disposable gloves and a facemask and gently gather dirty clothing, bedding and towels without creating a lot of motion or shaking them. When you are finished, remove your gloves, first, and then take off your facemask. Be sure to wash your hands after removing the gloves that handled the dirty laundry. Instructions on how to properly put on and take off gloves and facemasks can be found in the Self-Help Guide in Module 4.

All masks, gloves and paper towels can be disposed of with normal household waste. Be sure to tie garbage bags securely and wash your hands thoroughly after handling them.



If disinfectants are not available, you can make one by mixing 1/4 cup bleach in 1 gallon of water, or one tablespoon of bleach in four cups of water.



Reduce Your Risk

Taking all of the steps in this module can significantly reduce your risk of getting sick, with or without a flu pandemic. In Module 4, you'll learn about a flu pandemic's impact on health care.

Let's Review!

- Frequent handwashing keeps germs from spreading and helps protect you and people around you from getting sick.

Use soap and water and scrub your hands thoroughly for 15 to 20 seconds. You can time yourself by singing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.

- If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Know the difference between a facemask and a respirator and know when to wear them.
- Properly clean and disinfect hard surfaces and cloths.



MODULE 3 ANSWERS

QUIZ 1: C – 15 TO 20 SECONDS

Scrub your hands for 15 to 20 seconds. That's about the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.

QUIZ 2: C – UP TO 6 FEET

Droplets containing the flu can quickly travel up to 6 feet, contaminating everyone and everything in their path. That's why it's so important to always cover your nose and mouth properly and to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing.

QUIZ 3: D – BOTH B AND C ARE TRUE

Facemasks protect your own droplets from being spread to others, while respirators protect you from breathing in very small particles.

RESOURCES FOR MODULE 3

- *Wash Your Hands* and other materials (poster sample shown at the end of this module) available in English and Spanish, with special materials for children, from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services
www.state.nj.us/health/cd/handwashing.shtml
- *Use of Facemasks and Respirators in the Community* (shown on at the end of this module) adapted from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.nj.gov/health/flu/documents/facemasks_and_respirators.pdf.
For updates, visit:
www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/community/maskguidancecommunity.html
- www.pandemicflu.gov
- www.njflupandemic.gov

Be sure to check these websites regularly for updated information.

See you in Module 4!

Wash Your Hands



Wet



Soap



Scrub



Rinse



Dry



**Turn the
Water Off**

**How long
should I
wash?**

**As long as it
takes to sing
the ABCs!**



Use of Facemasks and Respirators in the Community

Very little is known about the benefits of wearing facemasks and respirators in a community setting to help control the spread of influenza. In the absence of clear science, the steps below offer a “best estimate” to help guide decisions. They will be revised as new information becomes available.

Consider wearing a facemask if

- You are sick with the flu and think you might have close contact with other people.
- You live with someone who has the flu (you therefore might be in the early stages of infection) and need to be in a crowded place. Limit the amount of time you spend in these crowded places and wear a facemask while you are there.
- You are well and do not expect to be in close contact with a sick person but need to be in a crowded place (within 6 feet) with **people not expected to be sick**. Limit the amount of time you spend in these crowded places and wear a facemask while you are there.

Consider wearing a respirator if

- You are well and you expect to be in close contact with **people who are known or thought to be sick with the flu**. Limit the amount of time you are in close contact with these people and wear a respirator during this time. These recommendations apply if you must take care of a sick person at home.

How to Use Facemasks and Respirators

Details on how to use facemasks and respirators can be found in the *Caring for the Flu at Home: A Self-Help Guide* found here: http://www.nj.gov/health/flu/documents/flu_guide.pdf

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For updated information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the use of facemasks and respirators, refer to:

<http://pandemicflu.gov/plan/community/maskguidancecommunity.html>



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